

Minister's Message 5-13-2020

Hello everyone! This is Pastor Melinda and Tank from Shiloh UCC. Sophia will probably show up during this "midweek meditation" somewhere, too. Sophie says "Hi," too. I hope everyone's doing well and everyone's healthy. Please, e-mail or give the church a call if you would like a phone call from me. You can also call me on my cell number.

Just a quick update on the LaMontagne household. Last Friday we bought a house in Dover, but as you can see we haven't moved in yet. We can't wait to move in toward the end of the month and finally feel a little more "settled."

I also can't wait to see all of you and have in person services. However, I am consulting with other ministers within our region, and the prognosis will require discipline. We have to be wise and cautious how and when we open up our church.

This is a new world. We want everyone to stay healthy and safe. What good would it do for our congregation if we all get sick at the same time? This is why the amazing people on Shiloh UCC's Consistory meet every two weeks and e-mail each other even more often. I am in dialog with our lay leaders, and I am in conversation with the larger denomination.

Because of this unusual situation I still wouldn't recognize many of you in person, but I want you to know that I am praying for you every day. We need to meet in person, but we also must be logical and prudent. I am honored to be your pastor and hope that after this difficult period of time is over, we will be able to bond and grow. As your new pastor, I want to get to know you, so that I am empowered to love and serve you, not only over the internet, but also in person in the traditional way that we have worshiped all of our lives.

Today I brought a Psalm with me that belongs to our Lectionary readings for this upcoming Sunday. So let's listen to it together with open ears and hearts.

Psalm 66:8-20

Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard,
9 who has kept us among the living,
and has not let our feet slip.
10 For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.
11 You brought us into the net;
you laid burdens on our backs;
12 you let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

13 I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will pay you my vows,
14 those that my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
15 I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah

16 Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for me.
17 I cried aloud to him,
and he was extolled with my tongue.
18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
19 But truly God has listened;
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.
20 Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me.

Bible scholars suggest that there might be two psalms hidden in Psalm 66. The first half of the Psalm (verses 1-12) talks about how God saved the Israelites from Egypt, while the second half (verses 13-20) talks about how God saved the Psalm writer from some type of trouble. However, the unity of the Psalm is also clear when we look at two significant verses. In verse 8 the Israelites exclaim: “Bless our God,” and in verse 20 the Psalm writer says, “Blessed be God.”

Why do the Israelites and the Psalm writer “bless” God? They praise God because God saved their lives. The Israelites bless God, because God “has kept us among the living,” because they went through life threatening experiences, and they are still here, still alive. The Psalm writer blesses God, because “*he has not rejected my prayer,*” because no matter what The psalmist went through, God always listened to him.

Together with this interesting, two-part Psalm, all we can do today is “bless God.” We are here and alive. We have gone through a lot, and even if we have not suffered personally, we have seen suffering through the media continuously. Maybe you recently lost people you knew or loved. The Coronavirus epidemic is hard on everyone for different reasons. Some people have to work long hours and risk their lives without hazard pay. Some people are out of work and wondering when life will return to normal. Some people are locked up so long that they are going crazy, because they are cooped up together like chickens in a hen house. :)

No matter what you are going through, if you are really busy trying to help others, or not busy enough, God is with you. **God is with you.** Just like God listened to the prayers of the Psalm writer, God listens to your prayers said in the silence of your heart, home, or car.

God loves you and has put all these gems in the Bible, so that you do not have to worry. This the whole reason we read the Bible. The Bible, though ancient, still speaks to our soul. We learn from it how God helped nations and individuals through thousands of years. It gives us hope. We have hope for the future, because God's love is steadfast. It is always with us. God's love is still with us, still listening to us, still comforting us, and yes, still speaking.

(Let us pray!)

Pastoral Prayer

Holy and everlasting God, we thank you for listening to our prayers and helping us deal with our troubles. Today we bring to you all our problems, fears, and worries. Take them from us and fill our empty spaces with your peace, love, and harmony. Calm our anxiety and heal our depression. Heal our bodies, minds, and souls during this difficult time. We pray for everyone who needs your special care: be with the lonely, the grieving, and the orphan. Be with the bored. Send your Holy Spirit that our boredom may transform into sacred presence. Help and heal our world, guide us toward a safer future. Be with our families, especially our children that they may heal from this trauma.

We ask you to be with all those people who are selflessly sacrificing for others. Be with all our healthcare workers, the police, fire fighters, and our men and women in the armed forces. Guide our Governors and mayors. Be with hospital administrators, and business leaders. Help us to be prudent in the face of a weakening economy and fragile healthcare system. Watch over our nation and guide us with your wisdom. Take good care of our congregation, too. Bless and protect Shiloh UCC, and everyone who belongs to your holy family. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: How Great Thou Art

Thank you for listening. Tomorrow, Thursday morning at 10:00 AM come and chat with me on the site that we will e-mail out to you.

Benediction: And now, go in peace and may the peace of God fill your hearts always. **Amen.**